

***Balclutha* Stop**

18 A Memorial to the Grand Age of Sail

You're listening to "Maritime Voices" from San Francisco Maritime National Historical Park. I'm Park Ranger Mark Neuweld. In this episode, we'll consider the significance of the sailing ship *Balclutha*, a memorial to the grand age of sail.

So why is this 19th century British merchant ship preserved in a national park dedicated to Pacific Coast maritime history? Launched in Scotland in 1886, *Balclutha* carried cargo on long ocean voyages throughout the world until finding her home in San Francisco. During her varied career, she transported California grain to Great Britain. Under the American flag, *Balclutha* ran Pacific Coast lumber to Australia, and carried thousands of men to the salmon-fishing grounds of Alaska. She sailed commercially until 1930, contributing to the cultural and economic growth of the Pacific Coast. Surviving 17 passages around Cape Horn, a disastrous wreck in Alaska, and the ravages of time, *Balclutha* was recalled to life by the Bay Area community in a "magnificent act of civic rescue."

Balclutha is significant because of the active role she played in global trade and commerce, connecting cultures throughout the world. She also speaks to us of human suffering, survival, and heroism. Listen closely and perhaps you will hear the footsteps of the men and women who walked her wooden decks more than a century ago. For some of these mariners, the high seas may have been a dangerous and desolate barrier, separating them from precious family and friends far away; for other seamen, the oceans of the world may have been a highway to adventure, freedom, and the realization of their dreams in a new world.

In her iron and steel fabric, *Balclutha* is a product of the industrial age. In her mode of operation, utilizing only wind and human muscle, she remains a survivor from an earlier era. Captain Alan Villiers captures the spirit of the age of sail in words that are especially relevant in the modern day: "These ships sailed in peace under God, silently, with grace. They destroyed nothing except occasionally themselves, for the price of error was high. They polluted nothing. They made all the great voyages of discovery. They opened up the earth, and they shifted peoples." *Balclutha* is one of the last steel-hulled, square-rigged ships still floating in the world. The National Park Service now preserves her as a memorial to the men and times of the grand age of sail.